

The Power of His Resurrection



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 27:62–66, Luke 24:36–39, Acts 3:14–16, 1 Corinthians 15, Phil. 3:7–10.*

Memory Text: “‘I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!’” (*Revelation 1:18, NIV*).

As Easter approached, a teacher sent her students out into nature around the school. She gave each a little box with the following assignment: Bring back something in the box that is a symbol of life. When the children returned, each box was opened, one at a time. The first box had a butterfly, which flew away as she opened the container. Another had leaves. Another twigs. But then one box she opened was empty.

“How stupid!” one student exclaimed. “Somebody didn’t do the assignment!”

At that point, Philip, a boy with Down’s syndrome, spoke up: “That’s my box.”

“Well, Philip,” the same boy continued, undeterred, “you messed up the assignment!”

“No,” replied Philip, confidently. “The tomb was empty!”

On that day Philip became a respected member of the group. He died not long afterward, and at his funeral all the members of the class brought empty boxes to the service, in honor of their fallen classmate.

Yes indeed, the tomb was empty! And in that empty tomb we find the great hope of all Christians everywhere. This week we look at that hope, which is found in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 14.*

The Story of the Resurrection: Part 1

(*Matt. 27:62–66*)

Several events may be described as pivotal to Christianity, among them the Incarnation, the Cross, and the Second Coming. But in a sense, the Resurrection trumps them all, even the Cross that we extolled in last week's lesson. For without the Resurrection, nothing else matters. Indeed, when we talk about the death of Jesus, we logically include the Resurrection, unstated. It is the central doctrine of the Christian faith.

Of all the world religions, Judaism and Christianity are the only two that espouse the concept of a resurrection, as such; and only Christianity makes it central. Only Christianity has been founded on the belief that its central Figure actually was raised from the dead. All four Gospels cover the extraordinary event, and they tell the story with a straightforwardness that makes it utterly credible.

What contribution does each of the following passages make to the credibility of the Resurrection story to follow?

Matt. 27:50–53

Matt. 27:54–56

Matt. 27:57–61 (compare Mark 15:42–47)

Matt. 27:62–66

All of the occurrences listed here are public. Given the date of the Gospel of Matthew (believed to be written before A.D. 70), eyewitnesses still would have been alive either to confirm or refute these reports. Nor would the religious establishment have had any interest in letting such claims and assertions go unchallenged if false: The rending of the temple curtain "*from the top*"! (certainly some of those who had ministered in the complex that day would have seen something); the earthquake would have been public and universal for the immediate area; the resurrection of dead people and their appearance to many in the city (what possible reason could the writer have for manufacturing a detail like that!); the witness of the Roman centurion and his fellow soldiers; the sealing of the tomb; the posting of a special guard; the list goes on. These are concrete events, related with no special pleading or defensiveness whatsoever.

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *John 11:25*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Recall that there truly was a literal, visible resurrection of Jesus, and many people were witnesses of that event.

Feel: Rekindle his or her gratitude to Jesus for giving His promise of eternal life.

Do: Comfort one another with the hope of the Resurrection to come.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. How Authentic Was the Resurrection?

A All of the events surrounding the resurrection of Jesus give indisputable evidence of its occurrence.

B The Christian faith is dependent on the validity of the Resurrection.

II. He Is Risen

A The miracles and eyewitness testimonies of the apostles gave evidence of a risen Savior.

B Many people besides the disciples were witnesses of the resurrection of Christ.

C Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the disciples spread the good news of the resurrected Lord.

III. The Resurrection and Life

A Many people were brought back to life when Jesus was resurrected. These individuals were seen by friends and loved ones, who also gave testimony of the risen Savior.

B Because of the resurrection of Jesus, we, too, have the hope of a resurrection. Otherwise death is the final end of us all.

C Without the Resurrection, the plan of salvation would be in vain.

▶ **Summary:** The resurrection of Christ was an actual event witnessed by many people, including the disciples. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we, too, have the hope of a resurrection.

The Story of the Resurrection: Part 2

(Luke 24:36–39)

In yesterday's lesson, we began listing a group of passages in the Gospels that describe events surrounding the death of Jesus, events that in their straightforward and unembellished naturalness commend the credibility of the Resurrection story. Following are a few more passages in the same vein.

What essential message is found in these verses? What key point do all of them have in common? *Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24:10–44.*

Although the above list does not carry any reference from John, all four Gospels cover the Resurrection in considerable detail.

Why do you think that is so? What is so important about the Resurrection to our faith?

“The historic faith of the Church has agreed with St. Paul: ‘If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile’ (1 Cor. 15:17). All other Christian doctrines are dependent upon the proclamation of the resurrection: the significance of Christmas lies in the fact that the child who was born is the one whom God raised from the dead; Good Friday is only the anniversary of one more martyrdom, unless he who died is the one who rose again; the institution of the Lord’s Supper in the Church would have been unthinkable, had not the Lord been known to the faithful in the breaking of bread.”—Alan Richardson, ed., “Resurrection of Christ,” *A Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), p. 290.

In the texts for today, we see the power of Jesus’ resurrection, both physically and spiritually. He broke the shackles of the tomb; the Roman seals gave way; the grave burst open. And He declares today, “I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!” (Rev. 1:18, NIV). If you were asked to say in ten words or fewer what the Resurrection means to you, what might those words be?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Of all the doctrines and teachings of Christianity, the idea of the resurrection of the dead has to be one of the most intense and faith-demanding teachings. The dead, rising? Some after having been gone for thousands of years? How could that be? How can anyone really believe this?

The answer, however, is simple—we believe it because the Word of God promises it. We believe it because Jesus promised it. We believe it because without it we would have no hope whatsoever. Indeed, without it, our faith would be meaningless. Without it, Christ’s first coming would have been a waste of time, and who among us believes that?

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Bible Commentary

(Read Luke 24:13–35.)

I. The “Buts” and “Besides” of Disappointment

The scene is the road to Emmaus. Two disappointed disciples are returning home from Jerusalem after witnessing the crucifixion of Jesus. A Stranger joins them, and they continue discussing their disappointment. In Luke 24:21 their narrative recollection of what happened over the weekend is punctuated with disappointment: “ ‘But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened’ ” *(NKJV)*.

When Jesus did not overthrow the Roman Empire as they had hoped, they continued to wish for some kind of uprising as a result of His death—something that would result in the Jewish people gaining political control. But Jesus’ death did no such thing. Even His closest disciples seemed to have disappeared. What could have been an opportune time of action was long since gone (it was three days since His death).

What this account should teach us is that it’s important that we not superimpose our own desires, our own wishes, our own expectations, on our understanding of doctrine. We need to be surrendered to what the Word of God teaches, even if it teaches things that aren’t exactly as we

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It Empowered a Movement *(Acts 3:14–16)*

How could such an outlandish belief as the resurrection of a dead prophet spread through a pagan empire like that of Rome if it had no credence? Why would a bunch of fishermen and tax collectors, against all odds, invent such a story? And if they did invent it, how did they come to believe it so strongly themselves that they were prepared not only to forsake family and friends to defend it but to give their lives for the sake of the One they proclaimed as the risen Christ?

The arrest, trial, and execution of their Master had left these followers broken, traumatized, defeated. Disillusioned, the erstwhile inner circle began falling back upon old patterns, moving back into their accustomed grooves (and they themselves tell the story). We hear only about going fishing (the former livelihood of most of them); but there also must have been a lot of brooding by the likes of nonfishermen, such as Matthew and Simon the Zealot, wondering where to go from there, what to do next.

Flash ahead weeks later, to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (*Acts 2*). As Peter delivered his impromptu Pentecostal sermon, it was his reference to Jesus as a living person, risen and exalted before the heavenly Father, the astonishing declaration that Jesus was alive, that hearers homed in on. “‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” they responded (*Acts 2:37, NIV*).

Nor was the emphasis on the Resurrection a fad for these early believers, an ephemeral novelty to be abandoned when something better came along. Quite to the contrary, the Resurrection constituted the central element of apostolic preaching, with Peter and the other apostles repeatedly returning to it in their discourses.

Read Acts 3:11–16, 4:8–12, 7:54–56, 17:29–31. What theme do they constantly refer to? And why?

“For the earliest Christian preaching it is the Resurrection that designates Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. . . . This is the point at which his reign as Messiah begins, when . . . he enters upon and inaugurates the age of GLORY.”—*Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. R–Z, p. 44.

Writing to the Philippians, Paul spoke of wanting to “know Christ and the power of his resurrection” (*Phil. 3:10, NIV*). What do you think that means? How can we today experience the power of the Resurrection in our lives? (*See, for example, John 3:3, Rom. 6:1–12.*)

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

like. We need to be surrendered to the Word; the history of Christianity is littered with the sad accounts of what happens when the Word of God is subjugated to human desires.

What are some of those examples of the Bible being subjugated and twisted by those who want to use it for their own selfish purposes?

II. The Burning of Spiritual Pyrosis

When the disciples realized that the Stranger traveling with them was Jesus resurrected, suddenly it all came together—how the Stranger rationally connected the dots of history from Moses to the Cross and drew the bigger picture of spiritual redemption; how they felt the overwhelming urge to be in His company and how they felt a burning spirit of conviction in their hearts as they listened to Him.

Consider This: Pyrosis is the medical term for acid reflux or heartburn. From their symptoms (*vs. 32*), it's possible that the men disregarded the uneasiness they felt while Jesus spoke to them (perhaps they chalked it up to heartburn?). They were so focused on their disappointment that they failed to see the enlightenment and clarity that were right in front of them. In what similar ways do we disregard the Holy Spirit? In what ways have things been presented so clearly to us and yet, at the time, from our own hardness of heart, we completely missed them? How can we learn to avoid making similar mistakes again?

III. The Context of Spiritual Redemption

There's no question about the utter importance of Christ's resurrection to our faith. Without it, nothing else that Jesus did while here really matters. What did His death on the cross accomplish for us if He weren't raised from the dead? What good were all His teachings to us if He were not raised from the dead? What good is our faith to us without Christ's resurrection?

Consider This: As Jesus spoke to these disciples, He helped them to understand not only the historicity of the plan of redemption but also the purpose of the plan of redemption for each person on earth. Jesus helped them see their individual place and role in God's plan of salvation.

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Provided Authority for Witnessing

(Phil. 3:7–10)

We see the power of the Resurrection in the ministry of the apostles. Peter's words to the cripple are anchored solid in a resurrected Savior: " 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk' " (*Acts 3:6, NIV*). Then as the people go wild with astonishment and wonder over the miracle, Peter reminds them of the trial and death of Jesus (*vss. 13, 14*) and then begins to move toward the good news, his goal from the start: " 'You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead' " (*vs. 15, NIV*). And, says Peter, it is through the power released by His resurrection that the crippled man was made to walk. " 'By faith in the name of Jesus, this man . . . was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing' " (*vs. 16, NIV*).

The spectacular miracle notwithstanding, Peter is arrested and called upon to answer for these unusual developments: " 'By what power or what name did you do this?' " (*Acts 4:7, NIV*). With such an invitation, Peter falls back on what fast was becoming his favorite theme, the resurrection of Jesus: " 'It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed' " (*vs. 10, NIV*).

So, on three separate occasions now, Peter has zeroed in like a laser beam upon the resurrection of Jesus as the source of his power for witnessing. In fact, the very preaching of Christ implied His resurrection (*Acts 5:40–42*).

"The conviction that Jesus continued to live transformed a dozen or so disconsolate followers of a slain and discredited leader into one of the most dynamic groups in human history. We read that tongues of fire descended upon them. People who were not speakers became eloquent. They exploded across the Greco-Roman world, preaching what has come to be called the Gospel but is literally the good news. Starting in an upper room in Jerusalem, they spread their message with such fervor that in their own generation it took root in every major city of the region."—Huston Smith, *The Illustrated World's Religions*, p. 215.

Read 1 Corinthians 15, Paul's great treatise on the Resurrection. How central is this truth to the Christian faith? In other words, how much hangs on it? Do you have loved ones who have passed away? What particular sections of Paul's treatise bring you the greatest comfort?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

As soon as they understood, accepted, and appreciated the events of the weekend, these disciples (who had just walked seven miles) turned around and returned to Jerusalem (*vss.* 33–35).

Why did they do this? What was the urgency to make the journey without resting? What does this tell us about our responsibility as those who understand and accept the message of the Cross?

► **STEP 3—Practice****Thought Questions:**

- 1 “Life must be understood backwards; but . . . it must be lived forward.”—Soren Kierkegaard (<http://www.brainyquote.com>). Apply this to spiritual growth. How do your past experiences and walk with the Lord strengthen your faith and your beliefs today? How does your past help you be a better witness for Christ’s grace and an advocate for the plan of salvation?
- 2 Why is the resurrection of Christ crucial to your faith? What if Christ had died for your sins but not risen to life?

Application Questions:

- 1 In what ways do you show gratefulness for and acceptance of Christ dying for you? How should His death affect the way you respond to the Holy Spirit?
- 2 In an age of war, terror, and natural disasters, what does the empty tomb say to you—that God is powerful and in control or that God is distant and aloof? Explain.

Witnessing

Jesus’ resurrection had a profound effect on everyone, especially on those in His “inner circle”—His disciples and His immediate family members (*Acts 1:14, Gal. 1:19*). How should the Resurrection affect our social and community interactions?

Guarantees Our Own Resurrection

(1 Cor. 15:20)

No matter how clear the New Testament is on the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus, some liberal theologians, trapped in a purely scientific and rationalist worldview, argue against the Resurrection being real. Instead, they say that the Resurrection should be seen as a myth, a metaphor of a new resurrected life we can have here and now if and when we accept, as a community, the moral teaching of Jesus.

However nice that might sound, it is a view based on human thinking and not on the clear teaching of God's Word, which is exceedingly clear and unequivocal in the literalness of Christ's resurrection.

For us, there is no danger accepting the Resurrection as a metaphor, not if we take the Word of God for what it says; and it is explicit about the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus. And once we are settled in our acceptance of the Resurrection, then we can for ourselves garner the hope it offers us in the face of death. Regardless of what happens to us in this life, we have the hope that, as Jesus rose from the dead, so will we. The promise of the Resurrection helps us to keep everything in its proper perspective.

Read the following passages. What hope do they hold out for our own resurrection?

John 5:25–29

John 11:23–26

1 Cor. 15:51–58

Rev. 1:18

The resurrection of Jesus established three certainties: (1) Our destiny is secure in Jesus (*1 Pet. 1:3–5*); (2) death is a vanquished foe (*1 Cor. 15:20–22*); and (3) power is available to share this fantastic news with others (*John 14:12, Acts 1:8*).

How should the hope and promise of our resurrection from the dead help us to keep our life here, and the things that happen in it, in proper perspective? Imagine what life would be like if you did not have this hope.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Consider This: How can your church “cash in” on the commercialism of the Easter season to market the gift of salvation?

► **STEP 4—Apply**

In the days when books were not readily available and libraries were nonexistent, reading was a serious and arduous undertaking. To read was to ingest every word and internalize the material before the book was circulated. Reading was more than rote memorization; it was a concentrated, emotional task experienced in solitude—with the aim to know the material and the writer inside out and to make its content imprinted forever in the reader’s mind and heart.

Application Questions:

1 Challenge yourself to read the Bible every day with the assumption that you won’t have one available tomorrow. How do you think this challenge will improve your study habits?

2 Why is it important to understand the Old Testament and the historicity of humanity prior to the death and resurrection of Christ? How can this knowledge enable you to be more comfortable when talking about the gift of salvation found through the Cross?

3 How do the Scriptures and the Cross specifically help you in the following areas: spiritually, mentally, physically, emotionally, and socially? Memorize a portion of Scripture each week.

Further Study: “Over the rent sepulcher of Joseph, Christ had proclaimed in triumph, ‘I am the resurrection, and the life.’ These words could be spoken only by the Deity. All created beings live by the will and power of God. They are dependent recipients of the life of God. From the highest seraph to the humblest animate being, all are replenished from the Source of life. Only He who is one with God could say, I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again. In His divinity, Christ possessed the power to break the bonds of death.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 785.

“During His ministry, Jesus had raised the dead to life. He had raised the son of the widow of Nain, and the ruler’s daughter and Lazarus. But these were not clothed with immortality. After they were raised, they were still subject to death. But those who came forth from the grave at Christ’s resurrection were raised to everlasting life. They ascended with Him as trophies of His victory over death and the grave. These, said Christ, are no longer the captives of Satan; I have redeemed them. I have brought them from the grave as the first fruits of My power, to be with Me where I am, nevermore to see death or experience sorrow.”—Page 786.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Take another look at 1 Corinthians 15, the flagship theological defense of the Resurrection in the New Testament. Follow Paul’s arguments in favor of this basic Christian teaching. Why do these texts make little sense if you believe that the righteous dead go immediately to heaven at death? How is our understanding of the state of the dead vindicated by these texts? What makes the promise of the Resurrection so crucial to us as Seventh-day Adventists with our view of the state of the dead?
- 2 Think about this question, and then bring your answer to class: How differently would you live if you believed that at death everything ended forever?
- 3 Go over all the textual evidence you can find that helps affirm the resurrection of Jesus. Bring it to class and together review the evidence. How compelling is it? How can you put this material together in a way that could be used as a powerful witnessing tool?